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Title of paper: Wally's grain in the machine: disturbing the distribution of Vivian's sensible

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Abstract

The Children like Wally's explanations for events better than mine, so I give fewer and fewer interpretations each day and instead listen to Wally's. The familiar chord he strikes stimulates others to speak with candor, and I am the beneficiary. However, Wally does not always teach me what I want to learn. (Paley, 1981, p. 6-7)

Acknowledging and working with children's agency in pedagogy is still in its infancy. While many educators acknowledge that children have rights and a voice, yet this is often difficult to translate in actual acts in classrooms and educational contexts. The above quote is taken from a teacher's narrative working in early years contexts. Her main character is Wally, a young boy who often gets himself into trouble with his peers. Yet the presence of the five-year old boy and his actions challenge the teacher Vivian Paley to question her actions and in particular her pedagogical decisions. While it is evident that Paley tries to give spaces to Wally's agency and voice, she struggles not to let herself close Wally down in set ideas and methods of instruction. In this paper we will be using ideas from Jacques Rancière to help us read Vivian Paley's narrative as efforts from her part to 'distribute the sensible' over her class and in particular Wally. Wally, however, disrupts (even if temporarily and often for a very short time) the teacher's 'distribution' through his acts. This has implications for education, to acknowledge children as not only having voice but as able to challenge and disrupt the teacher and the educational context through their actions.

References

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